Al-Shebab: An Al-Qaeda Affiliate Case Study

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Abstract

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Glossary

AIAI	Al-Ittihad Al-Islami
AMISOM	African Union Mission in Somalia
AQ	Al-Qaeda
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
AQIS	Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent
AQS	Al-Qaeda Syria
ARPCT	Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism
ARS	Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia
ASD (SO/LIC)	Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
CMO	Civil-Military Operations
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DOD	Department of Defense
FGS	Federal Government of Somalia
GWOT	Global War on Terror
HVT	High Value Target
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
MRC	Mombasa Republican Council
MYC	Muslim Youth Center
NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act
SNA	Somali National Army
SSR	Security Sector Reform
TFG	Transitional Federal Government
TNG	Transitional National Government

UIC	Union of Islamic Courts
UNOSOM I	United Nations Operation in Somalia I
UNOSOM II	United Nations Operations in Somalia II
UNITAF	United Task Force (Somalia)
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

Introduction

Section 1228 of the 2015 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) states, "The Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State and the Director of National Intelligence, shall provide for the conduct of an independent assessment of the effectiveness of the United States' efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda, including its affiliated groups, associated groups, and adherents since September 11, 2001." The Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations/Low Intensity Conflict (ASD (SO/LIC)) asked CNA to conduct this independent assessment, which was completed in August 2017.[1]

Section 1228 specified that the independent assessment should include these topics:

1. An assessment of Al-Qaeda core's current relationship with affiliated groups, associated groups, and adherents, and how it has changed over time.

2. An assessment of the current objectives, capabilities, and overall strategy of Al-Qaeda core, its affiliated groups, associated groups, and adherents, and how they have changed over time.

3. An assessment of the operational and organizational structure of Al-Qaeda core, its affiliated groups, associated groups, and adherents, and how it has changed over time.

4. An analysis of the activities that have proven to be most effective and least effective at disrupting and dismantling Al-Qaeda, its affiliated groups, associated groups, and adherents.

5. Recommendations for United States policy to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al-Qaeda, its affiliated groups, associated groups, and adherents.

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[1] Julia McQuaid, Jonathan Schroden, Pamela G. Faber, P. Kathleen Hammerberg, Alexander Powell, Zack Gold, David Knoll, and William Rosenau, *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda,* CNA DRM-2017-U-015710-Final, August 2017.

In order to answer the first four questions posed by Section 1228, CNA conducted eight case studies on groups affiliated and associated with Al-Qaeda.[2] The case studies were then used to conduct a cross-case comparative analysis.

This document is a stand-alone version of the al-Shebab case study used in the *Independent Assessment.* CNA is publishing each of the eight case studies separately for the convenience of analysts and others who may have a regional or functional focus that corresponds to a specific case study. For the context in which this case study was used and for CNA's full findings, see the *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda.*[3]

The present case study is organized as follows: First, we introduce al-Shebab by highlighting its leadership structure, its relationship with Al-Qaeda core, its ideology and goals, and its funding. Second, we explain the evolution of the group by phases, from its origins to the present day. Third, we outline the security vulnerabilities in the areas of Somalia where al-Shebab operates. Fourth, we outline the U.S. approach to countering al-Shebab. We conclude the case study with a discussion on whether the U.S. has, at any time, effectively defeated, dismantled, or disrupted the group.

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[2] These groups include: Al-Qaeda "core," Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Shebab, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), Al-Qaeda Syria (AQS), and the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG).

[3] McQuaid et al., *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda.*

Overview of al-Shebab

Harakat al-Shebab al-Mujahideen (The Movement of Mujahidin Youth), or al-Shebab, is an Al-Qaeda (AQ)–affiliated violent jihadist group based in southern and central Somalia. With an estimated 6,000–12,000 fighters, al-Shebab is among the largest Islamist armed groups in East Africa.[4] Key Shebab military targets inside Somalia include the Somali National Army (SNA) and the forces of the United Nations–mandated African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). Al-Shebab has demonstrated some ability to mount deadly cross-border operations, such as the September 21, 2013 attack on the upscale Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Kenya, where Shebab gunmen murdered at least 67 people and wounded more than 200 others.[5] Although al-Shebab has adherents among Somali diaspora communities in the United States and elsewhere in the West, the group's ability to conduct sophisticated terrorist attacks outside East Africa is limited.[6] With support from the United States, Somali and UN forces have made considerable progress against al-Shebab in recent years.[7] But any predictions of the group's demise may be premature. Given the

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[4] Counter Extremism Project, "Al-Shabab," accessed January 30, 2017, http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-Shabab.

[5] Lauren Ploch Blanchard, *The September 2013 Terrorist Attack in Kenya: In Brief,* Congressional Research Service, Report R43245, November 14, 2013, accessed May 19, 2017, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43245.pdf; and William Rosenau and Ghassan Schbley, "The Charcoal Connection: U.S. Security Assistance and Kenyan Counterterrorism," War on the Rocks, September 30, 2013, accessed May 20, 2017, https://warontherocks.com/2013/09/the-charcoal-connection-u-s-security-assistance-and-kenyan-counterterrorism/.

[6] Jonathan Masters and Mohammed Aly Sergie, "Al-Shebab," Council on Foreign Relations, March 13, 2015, accessed May 15, 2017, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/al-Shebab, accessed May 15, 2017.

[7] Sunguta West, "Jahba East Africa: Islamic State Alters the Dynamic of Somalia's Conflict," *Terrorism Monitor* 14, no. 9 (April 29, 2016), accessed May 22, 2017, https://jamestown.org/program/jahba-east-africa-islamic-state-alters-the-dynamic-of-somalias-conflict/; and Harun Maruf and Dan Joseph, "U.S.-Trained Somali Commandos Fight al-Shebab." *Voice of America*, July 21, 2014, accessed May 22, 2017, http://www.voanews.com/a/us-trained-somali-commandos-fight-against-al-Shebab/1968832.html.

group's considerable resiliency, it is likely that al-Shebab will remain a menacing feature of the region's security landscape.[8]

Leadership and structure

Since 2014, al-Shebab has been led by Ahmed Omar, also known as Abu Ubaydah. Omar succeeded Ahmed Abdi Godane, who was killed by a U.S. airstrike on September 1, 2014. It was under Godane's leadership that the movement was at the height of its administrative, territorial, and military power. But as one scholar has observed, it was also under Godane's time as emir that al-Shebab "fell into decline, losing great swaths of territory and most major urban centers and economic hubs."[9]

As emir, Omar heads both an executive council and a shura council. The later, a consultative body, determines strategy and assigns regional governors and military commanders who operate with relative autonomy. Each region is administered by a local council, comprised of a governor and deputies responsible for finance, administration, and security. Coordination among regional groups is common.[10] The deputy leader of al-Shebab, Mukhtar Robow (also known as Abu Mansur), was a deputy leader of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), from which al-Shebab emerged in the mid-2000s.

Junior leaders run al-Shebab's media branch, law enforcement, and military operations. Al-Shebab's media branch, al-Kataib (the Brigades), disseminates recruitment videos for international audiences; al-Shebab also operates a radio station, Radio Andalus,[11] and periodically operates Facebook and Twitter[12] accounts.

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[8] Cedric Barnes, "Somalia's Al-Shabaab down But far From Out," International Crisis Group, June 27, 2016, accessed May 22, 2017, http://blog.crisisgroup.org/africa/somalia/2016/06/27/somalias-al-shabaab-down-but-far-from-out/.

[9] Christopher Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane." *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 9 (September 2014), accessed February 9, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CTCSentinel-Vol7Iss96.pdf.

[10] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen," September 28, 2016, accessed February 13, 2017, https://janes.ihs.com/TerrorismInsurgencyGroups/Display/1320917.

[11] Nel Hodge, "How Somalia's al-Shebab militants hone their image," BBC News, June 6, 2014, accessed 3/14/17, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27633367.

[12] Hamza Mohamed, "Al-Shabab say they are back on Twitter," AlJazeera, December 16, 2013, accessed 3/14/2017, http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/12/al-shabab-claim-they-are-back-twitter-2013121610453327578.html.

Al-Shebab has two military branches: Jaysh al-Usr ("army of hardship"), the external military branch; and Jaysh al-Hisbah ("army of morality"), the internal religious police force. The Maktabatu Amniyat (Ministry of Justice and Internal Security) is al-Shebab's capable and feared intelligence organization, responsible for recruiting spies, assassinating perceived adversaries, and helping to promote and maintain the centralization of power inside the group.[13]

Relationship with Al-Qaeda core

Al-Shebab pledged allegiance to Osama Bin Laden in 2008[14] and became a formal Al-Qaeda affiliate in 2012.[15] Like other affiliates within the Al-Qaeda firmament, it has maintained an anti-American stance through its propaganda.[16]

Even before al-Shebab's formal Al-Qaeda affiliation, the core provided the Somali group with strategic guidance and direction. For example, an August 2010 letter to Bin Laden notes "the pledge of allegiance from our brothers in Somalia," and highlights that this allegiance requires "jihad for establishing an Islamic Caliphate."[17] Al-Shebab also had contact with other affiliates, including Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In 2008, American-born AQAP cleric Anwar al-Awlaki praised al-Shebab for fighting against the U.S.-backed Ethiopian invasion. In 2010, AQAP deputy leader Said al-Shihri encouraged additional engagement between al-Shebab and AQAP. Al-Shebab and AQAP have exchanged fighters and weapons between Yemen and Somalia. Al-Shebab has obtained weapons and learned tactics from AQAP, including use of laptop explosives and car bombs.

Al-Shebab's joining Al-Qaeda had mutual benefits: AQ's presence in East Africa dates to Osama Bin Laden's time in Sudan (1992–1996) and the establishment of cells that perpetrated the August 7, 1998 bombings of the U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. For Al-Qaeda, al-Shabaab became its long-awaited

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[13] Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 83-84.

[14] Adlini Ilma Ghaisany Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 5, no. 1 (2014), accessed February 8, 2017, doi: http://doi.org/10.15664/jtr.827, http://jtr.st-andrews.ac.uk/articles/10.15664/jtr.827/.

[15] BBC News, "Somalia's al-Shabab join Al-Qaeda," BBC News, 10 February 2012, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16979440.

[16] Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)."

[17] Azmarai (alias for Osama Bin Laden), "Letter from Osama bin Laden to Shaykh Mahmud," Office of the Director of National Intelligence, 2010.

affiliate in East Africa. Through its association with Al-Qaeda, al-Shebab has received training, funding and recruitment benefits.[18] The two groups cooperate on indoctrination, explosives training, and assassinations. AQ plays a role in al-Shebab's leadership, with several foreigners sitting on al-Shebab's executive council.

Ideology and goals

Like other Al-Qaeda affiliates, al-Shebab has both local and international goals. Al-Shebab's national objectives include overthrowing the Somali government, expelling foreign forces from Somalia, and establishing an Islamic state according to its version of sharia law.[19] Al-Shebab's internationalist goals include spreading global jihad and supporting AQ and its affiliates. Labels such as Salafism, Wahabism, and Takfirism are often used to describe al-Shebab's politico-religious belief system, but as one prominent scholar of the movement cautions, these ideological categories are typically hazy and ill defined.[20]

Funding

Al-Shebab's foreign funding comes from AQ, non-Somali sympathizers, and the Somali diaspora. Domestic funding comes from local proselytizing and racketeering. Al-Shebab has generated up to $100 million per year from donations, fees levied at ports, taxes on goods, checkpoint fees, and extortion. After seizing the port city Kismayo in 2008, al-Shebab received an estimated $35–50 million annually from the charcoal trade. Even after the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) retook Kismayo in 2012, al-Shebab benefited from the charcoal trade in other areas. Al-Shebab also invests in gold and facilitates cash flows through mobile money transfers. When in power in Mogadishu in 2009-2010, al-Shebab controlled the main Bakara market, taxed farmers, and regulated cross-border smuggling with Kenya. Since 2013, al-Shebab has relied heavily on informal "taxation" and outright extortion.

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[18] Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)."

[19] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

[20] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

Evolution of al-Shebab by Phase

Phase one: Origins 1990s-2005

Al-Shebab's roots[21] can be traced back to the 1980s and the activities of al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), a Salafi organization that protested the secularist policies of long-time Somali dictator Siad Barre. AIAI had local goals as well as pan-Islamist objectives.[22] It developed ties to Al-Qaeda in the 1990s.[23] AIAI's leadership included Aden Hashi Ayro, who would become al-Shebab's first leader.

In 1991, Barre was overthrown by a coalition of clan-based rebel groups.[24] Clan-based warlords such as Muhammad Farah Aidid dominated southern Somali politics in the 1990s, and AIAI sought to take advantage of the chaos. From 1992–1996, AIAI attempted to build an emirate in the Gedo region, but the project was crushed by Ethiopian forces after AIAI perpetrated several bombings in Ethiopia.[25] The resulting battle, which likely involved Robow and Ayro, may have been the first time AIAI established contact with Al-Qaeda. In 1998, AIAI was weak, and Ayro went to

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[21] The "phases" used here are adopted from Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[22] Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*.

[23] United Nations, "Security Council Committee Report Pursuant to Resolutions 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) And 2253 (2015) Concerning Isil (Da'esh) Al-Qaida And Associated Individuals Groups Undertakings And Entities," United Nations Security Council Subsidiary Organs, accessed February 9, 2017, https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/al-itihaad-al-islamiya/aiai.

[24] Jane Perlez, "Insurgents Claiming Victory in Somalia," *New York Times*, January 28, 1991, http://www.nytimes.com/1991/01/28/world/insurgents-claiming-victory-in-somalia.html.

[25] International Crisis Group, "Somalia's Islamists," International Crisis Group, December 12, 2005 accessed February 9, 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/somalia/somalias-islamists, pp. 7-10.

Afghanistan and allegedly met Bin Laden.[26] After 1999, powerful businessmen began to marginalize the southern warlords.[27] It was during this time that al-Shebab began to take shape.

There are conflicting accounts over the events surrounding the official formation of al-Shebab. Some evidence suggests that a loose organization of like-minded individuals coalesced in the 1990s, including Ayro and Ibrahim Al-Afghani (d. June 2013, killed by fighters loyal to Godane).[28] According to a senior Al-Shebab figure, the group officially formed in 2002 after members returned to Somalia from jihadist training camps in Afghanistan.[29] Al-Shebab's first attacks date from 2003, when Ayro's fighters killed foreign aid workers and targeted Somalis believed to be working with anti-Shebab counterterrorism networks.[30] The formation of al-Shebab was aided by what remained of Al-Qaeda in East Africa. After 9/11, the US continued to target AQ in East Africa in Somalia, in what became known as the "Shadow War" of Mogadishu.[31] By 2003, the still ill-defined al-Shebab had a presence in Mogadishu and counted at least several dozen followers.

From 2004-2006 al-Shebab was a militia associated with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The popularity of the Islamic Courts was not based solely on ideology but, rather, on popular desires for an alternative to warlords. These courts dated from the late 1990s, but grew in importance in the early 2000s as other forms of governance failed to take root in Somalia. As an alliance between businessmen and Muslim clerics, the courts included a range of ideologies, from moderates to jihadists, including Hassan Dahir Aweys of AIAI. Al-Shebab was one of the radical militias associated with the UIC.[32] During al-Shebab's association with the UIC, it publicly denounced terrorism and Al-Qaeda.[33]

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[26] Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012.*

[27] "Conflict in Somalia: Drivers and Dynamics," The World Bank, January 2005, https://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTSOMALIA/Resources/conflictinsomalia.pdf, pp. 11-12.

[28] Nathaniel Horadam, "Profile: Ibrahim Haji Jama Mead (Ibrahim al Afghani)," AEI Critical Threats, November 14, 2011, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/al-shabaab-leadership/ibrahim-haji-jama-mead-afghani-november-14-2011.

[29] "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

[30] International Crisis Group, "Somalia's Islamists," p. 11.

[31] Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012.*

[32] International Crisis Group, "Somalia's Islamists," p. 11.

[33] Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)."

Al-Shebab's leaders have come from different clans: Ayro from the Ayr (a sub-clan of the Hawiye),[34] Godane from the Isaaq,[35] Umar from the Dir,[36] and Robow from the Rahanweyn.[37] As such, the movement attempted to have a multi-clan appeal, which differentiated it from most other groups in Somalia. At the same time, however, al-Shebab's strength in southern Somalia suggests that it recruits heavily among the Rahanweyn and Hawiye clans.[38] After building a training center in 2005, al-Shebab began to recruit, expand, and unify.

Phase two: Expansion 2005-2006

A variety of factors contributed to increasing popular support for al-Shebab during this period, including the group's opposition to Ethiopian-supported clans, its criticism of corrupt warlords, the decline of the warlord system, the rise of a business class, and the increased power of sharia courts.[39] In February 2006, weakened warlords formed the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter Terrorism (ARPCT) to counter foreign AQ fighters in Mogadishu and to challenge the Islamic Courts. In June 2006, the UIC, with al-Shebab's assistance, defeated the ARPCT and expanded its influence over Mogadishu, along with much of south-central Somalia.[40] Al-Shebab benefited: Godane was appointed general secretary of the UIC executive, Ayro was given command of the UIC's combined militia, and Robow was

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[34] Eric Schmitt and Jeffrey Gettleman, "Qaeda Leader Reported Killed in Somalia," *The New York Times,* May 2, 2008, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/02/world/africa/02somalia.html.

[35] Christopher Anzalone, "The Life and Death of Al-Shabab Leader Ahmed Godane." *CTC Sentinel* 7, no. 9 (September 2014), accessed February 9, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/v2/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/CTCSentinel-Vol7Iss96.pdf.

[36] Sam Cleaves, "Profile: Ahmad Umar (Abu Ubaidah)," AEI Critical Threats, February 17, 2015, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.criticalthreats.org/somalia/al-shabaab-leadership/ahmed-umar-abu-ubaidah-february-17-2015.

[37] Ibn Siqilli, "Harakat al-Shabab & Somalia's Clans," al-Wasat – الوسط, MARCH 8, 2011, accessed February 9, 2017, https://thewasat.wordpress.com/2011/03/08/harakat-al-shabab-somalias-clans/.

[38] Council on Foreign Relations, "Somalia's Clan Families," Council on Foreign Relations, 2002, accessed February 9, 2017, http://dev-www.cfr.org/somalia/somalias-clan-families/p13315.

[39] Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012.*

[40] Emily Wax and Karen DeYoung, "U.S. Secretly Backing Warlords in Somalia," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2006, 2006, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/16/AR2006051601625.html.

made a key commander.[41] In July 2006, Bin Laden called for Muslims to support the UIC. In September 2006, al-Shebab led other Islamic Court militias to take Kismayo, further increasing al-Shebab's revenue. Al-Shebab and UIC successes brought more foreign fighters to Somalia, including former members of Al-Qaeda's cells, and a number of Westerners, including an American, Omar Hammami.

Ethiopia's invasion of Somalia in December 2006, launched with tacit U.S. support,[42] contributed to the collapse of the UIC.[43] After the dissolution of the UIC, al-Shebab became the premier insurgent group in Somalia. Al-Shebab formally broke with the UIC in 2007, after exiled UIC leadership allied with secular opposition to form the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia (ARS) in Eritrea. Al-Shebab presented itself as the frontline defense against the secular Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Ethiopian occupation.[44] In mid-2007, al-Shabaab adopted the formal name Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen and began to focus on leading an insurgency.[45] During 2006–2008, al-Shebab was further integrated into the global jihad framework as a Somali extension of Al-Qaeda.[46] In 2007-2008, al-Shebab first expressed a desire for global jihad and the restoration of the caliphate.[47]

Phase three: Insurgency (2007–2008)

Al-Shebab focused on hit-and-run operations, avoiding outright confrontation with the superior Ethiopian forces. Al-Shebab's tactics often have been relatively unsophisticated. Its successes have relied on a permissive, insecure, and poorly governed environment. Al-Shebab often faced limited resistance from poorly armed informal militias. The expansion of al-Shebab's territory was largely the result of

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[41] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

[42] Mark Mazzetti, "Efforts by C.I.A. Fail in Somalia, Officials Charge," *The New York Times,* June 8, 2006, accessed February 9, 2017, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/06/08/world/africa/08intel.html.

[43] Ken Menkhaus, "There and Back Again in Somalia," Middle East Research and Information Project, February 11, 2007, Ken Menkhaus accessed February 8, 2017, http://www.merip.org/mero/mero021107.

[44] Chris Albin-Lackey, *"So Much to Fear" War Crimes and the Devastation of Somalia,* Human Rights Watch, December 8, 2008, accessed February 9, 2017, https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/12/08/so-much-fear/war-crimes-and-devastation-somalia.

[45] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

[46] Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)."

[47] Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)."

taking advantage of an absence of governing authority in the country. Additionally, much of al-Shebab's high-casualty attacks have been on lightly defended "soft" targets, where relatively unsophisticated assault tactics proved effective. Al-Shebab has improved its tactical proficiency over time.

During the peak of its insurgent phase, Al-Shebab took advantage of the proliferation of small arms in Somalia and a variety of medium and heavy weaponry recycled from the Siad Barre regime.[48] Al-Shebab targeted national infrastructure, security forces, government administrations, civil society, and identity groups, including Sufi Muslims. Al-Shebab has repeatedly attempted to assassinate Somalia's heads of state and other symbolic figures.[49] Common tactics included bombing strategic locations, guerilla and terror tactics, and political threats and assassinations. In 2007, most of al-Shebab's attacks were still directed against the Transitional Federal Government. Attack squadrons consisted of seven to eight men who were paid per attack based on the severity and skill required. Al-Shebab also began to attack TFG posts and unoccupied cities, hold them for a few days, and then withdraw, all while advertising their success in the media.

An early Shebab leader, Aden Hashi Farah Ayro, was killed on May 1, 2008 by a U.S. airstrike.[50] His successor, Ahmed Godane, worked to align al-Shebab more closely with Al-Qaeda, and began using suicide bombers for the first time.[51] In tactical terms, Al-Shebab's use of suicide bombers signaled that they had adopted an "internationalist position"—their loyalty to international jihadism—as suicide bombings were previously taboo within Somalia.

Aided by clan alliances, al-Shebab continued to conquer territory throughout late 2008. In anticipation of a political settlement between the TFG and other factions, Ethiopia scaled down its forces in Somalia, leading to military victories by al-Shebab both inside Mogadishu and elsewhere in the country. By early 2009, al-Shebab was

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[48] Feisal Omar and Abdirahman Hussein, "Mogadishu car bomb kills five at local government HQ," Reuters, April 11, 2016, accessed February 10, 2017, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-somalia-blast-idUSKCN0X8109.

[49] Mohamed Sheikh Nor, "Somali Lawmaker Injured, Guards Killed in Al-Shabaab Shooting," Bloomberg, April 5, 2016, accessed Feburary 10, 2017, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-04-05/somali-lawmaker-injured-guards-killed-in-al-shabaab-shooting.

[50] Osman Warfa, "The Long-Term Effects of Al-Shabaab Terrorism," *The Star* (Nairobi), May 24, 2014, accessed May 21, 2017, http://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2014/05/24/the-long-term-effects-of-al-shabaab-terrorism_c942161.

[51] Counter Extremism Project, "Al-Shabab," accessed January 30, 2017, http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-Shabab.

poised to continue its territorial gains and enter a new phase in its development, that of governance.

Phase four: Governance and the "Golden Age" (2009–2010)

The TFG and ARS signed the Djibouti Agreement in late 2008, and Ethiopia withdrew from Mogadishu in January 2009. Afterward, al-Shebab made enormous territorial gains. In early 2009, al-Shebab easily took control of Baidoa, the interim capital of the TFG. However, al-Shebab was unable to dislodge Ugandan and Burundian AMISOM forces from Mogadishu. By mid-2009, al-Shebab controlled most of southern Somalia with a force of approximately 5,000 soldiers.

Al-Shebab's governance style placed a premium on law, order, and safety, which generated goodwill among a populace accustomed to predatory warlords and corrupt TFG officials. Al-Shebab's rule was harsh: it enforced sharia, imposed conservative dress, and censored the media. Al-Shebab provided limited humanitarian services in the areas under its control, sometimes working reluctantly with international aid agencies.[52]

Formal institutions within al-Shebab continued to develop, including the Maktabatu Amniyat, which was controlled by Godane and used for internal and external intelligence gathering. The Maktabatu Da'wa spread al-Shebab's interpretation of sharia. The Maktabatu I'laam, or Ministry of Information, controlled TV and radio stations and websites. The Maktabatu Siyaasada iyo Gobolad (Ministry of the Interior) controlled the *walis* (governors). The Maktabatu Maaliya (Ministry of Finance) controlled taxation. A complex court system also emerged. Multiple training camps were built that focused on hand-to-hand combat and suicide-bomber training. Recruitment pipelines solidified during this time, with ethnic Somalis travelling from the U.S., Europe, and the Middle East to join al-Shebab in Somalia.

In 2009, al-Shebab increasingly directed its propaganda to an international audience,[53] but its actual military operations remained largely Somali-focused. In Mogadishu, the Somali government faced the constant threat of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), assassination, and kidnapping. Attacks carried out outside of Somalia

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[52] Ashley Jackson and Abdi Aynte, "Al-Shabaab engagement with aid agencies," Humanitarian Policy Group, Policy Brief 53, December 2013, https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8749.pdf.

[53] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

also reflected Somali-centric issues, including the 2010 coordinated suicide bomb attacks in Uganda,[54] which aimed to drive Ugandan and Burundian forces out of Somalia, and drive a wedge between them and their support of the TFG.

This period of expansion saw a decisive setback. In September 2010, al-Shebab carried out the "Ramadan Offensive" against AMISOM on Godane's orders—and over the objections of his senior lieutenants. For al-Shebab, the turn from insurgent tactics to conventional warfare was a disaster, with Robow and Shongole's forces bearing the brunt of the losses. After the offensive, dissatisfaction with Godane's leadership grew.

Phase five: Fracturing, factionalism and territorial loss (2010–2013)

Al-Shebab was in crisis after the Ramadan Offensive. Godane's ability to lead was questioned by other leaders, including Robow and Shongole. Two major points of discord were the tactics used during the offensive, which highlighted al-Shebab's weakness as a conventional force, and the role of the Amniyat, which functioned largely outside of al-Shebab's justice system and under Godane's direct control. Shongole and others publicly stated their opposition to Godane's choices. Tensions and clan rivalries rose throughout al-Shebab. Shongole criticized Godane for the heavy loss of life and alleged "hidden agendas." Robow criticized Godane for a perceived disproportionate number of casualties borne by Robow's reinforcement.[55]

Aware of al-Shebab's growing weakness, AMISOM and the TFG launched an offensive in Mogadishu in February 2011, regaining much territory. Al-Shebab largely withdrew from Mogadishu in August 2011 and renewed its focus on insurgency over conventional warfare. Al-Shebab lost control over much of south and central Somalia because of pressure from AMISOM and Kenyan forces, who invaded southern Somalia in October 2001.[56] Meanwhile, political circumstances in Somalia changed, although al-Shebab's core goals did not. The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was formed in 2012, led by President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud. Overthrowing the FGS remains a core objective for al-Shebab.

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[54] Counter Extremism Project, "Al-Shabab," accessed January 30, 2017, http://www.counterextremism.com/threat/al-Shabab.

[55] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

[56] BBC News, "Somalia's al-Shabab rebels leave Mogadishu," August 6, 2011, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14430283.

Al-Qaeda's losses in 2011, particularly the killing of Osama Bin Laden, also hurt al-Shebab. The group held a public memorial service for Bin Laden outside Mogadishu, where Robow extolled the relationship between Bin Laden and the Somali people and proclaimed their loyalty to new leader Ayman al-Zawahiri. It was at this time that al-Shebab officially declared a merger with Al-Qaeda in February 2012, perhaps in a bid to revive the fortunes of both organizations.

Criticism continued to follow Godane as al-Shebab lost territory. Various pressures, including territorial loss, the departure of foreign fighters to their home countries during the Arab Spring, and a widespread drought, led to a major division in al-Shebab. Godane began to purge those he viewed as disloyal. In 2012, high-profile foreign fighter and U.S. national Omar Hammami issued a video claiming that his life was at risk as a result of "differences that occurred regarding matters of the sharia and matters of the strategy." A second statement by Hammami said that Godane and other al-Shebab elite lived lavish, un-Islamic lifestyles. The resulting disputes pulled in different commanders and escalated into violence when rival al-Shebab groups, including those loyal to Godane, Robow and Aweys, fought one another. Robow went into hiding and Aweys surrendered to security forces. Shongole continued to clash with Godane but remained part of the group. In 2013, reports claimed Hammami had been killed by al-Shebab militants.[57] Though Godane was able to purge internal al-Shebab competition,[58] his success was short-lived: he was killed by a U.S. airstrike in September 2014.

Phase six: Expanded regional focus and return to insurgency (2013–2017)

After Godane's death, Ahmad Umar was announced as his successor. In October 2014, al-Shabaab lost control of its last major urban stronghold and access point to the Indian Ocean, the town of Baraawe.[59] However, the security situation in Somalia is still tenuous, and al-Shebab still has the capacity to launch large-scale attacks

[57] Jane's World Insurgency and Terrorism, "Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen."

[58] Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of Al-Shabaab," *CTC Sentinel*, April 22, 2016, accessed February 14, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-resilience-of-al-shabaab.

[59] United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2244 (2015): Somalia,* United Nations, 16-16743 (E) 021116 2016, accessed February 14, 2017, http://www.un.org/ga/search /view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2016/919.

against AMISOM and political authorities in Mogadishu.[60] Al-Shebab still has a strong presence in much of southern Somalia.

Al-Shebab has continued to use various insurgent tactics within and outside Somalia,[61] mixing high-profile operations against civilians with the more common operations against AMISOM, the FGS, and opposing militia bases and positions.[62] Since 2013, al-Shebab has increasingly focused on attacking regional opponents, most notoriously with the September 21, 2013 attack by gunmen on Kenya's Westgate Mall in Nairobi, and the April 2, 2015 attack on Garissa University College in the country's North East Province.[63] On February 2, 2016, an al-Shebab militant detonated a concealed laptop bomb aboard Daallo Airlines Flight 159. Though the explosion killed only the attacker, the bombing highlights a new level of al-Shebab's terrorist aspirations. Al-Shebab has continued to support like-minded groups inside Kenya, including the Mombasa Republican Council (MRC) and the Muslim Youth Center (MYC), which allegedly assisted in the Westgate operation.

Such attacks are also meant to reinforce al-Shebab's ties to Al-Qaeda. Godane stated that the Westgate attack occurred close to the anniversary of 9/11. Additionally, in September 2014, al-Shabaab reiterated its pledge to al-Zawahiri and Al-Qaeda as part of a statement announcing Godane's martyrdom.

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has released several videos entreating al-Shebab to switch its allegiance from Al-Qaeda. Al-Zawahiri has publicly claimed that Godane disapproved of ISIS.[64] Other sources indicated that Godane developed ties with ISIS militias before his death, however, and received monetary support from ISIS as AQ funding declined.[65] Godane may have been planning a transfer of fighters from Somalia to Syria to fight alongside ISIS.[66] Al-Shebab has also competed with ISIS for

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[60] United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2244 (2015): Somalia.*

[61] Sjah, "Tracing Al Shabaab's Decision to Cooperate with Al-Qaeda in Somalia (2008)."

[62] UN Security Council, *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council Resolution 2244 (2015): Somalia.*

[63] Christopher Anzalone, "The Resilience of Al-Shabaab," *CTC Sentinel*, April 22, 2016, accessed February 14, 2017, https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/the-resilience-of-al-shabaab.

[64] Alexander Meleagrou-Hitchens, "Terrorist Tug-of-War: ISIS and Al-Qaeda Struggle for al Shabab's Soul," *Foreign Affairs*, October 8, 2015, 2015, accessed February 14, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/kenya/2015-10-08/terrorist-tug-war.

[65] "SOMALIA: Deceased Al Shabab chief had ties with ISIS, sources," RBC Radio, October 30, 2014, 2014, accessed February 10, 2017, http://www.raxanreeb.com/2014/10/somalia-deceased-al-shabab-chief-had-ties-with-isis-sources/.

[66] "SOMALIA: Deceased Al Shabab chief had ties with ISIS, sources," RBC Radio.

recruits. Defections from al-Shebab have been strongest in the north Somali autonomous region of Puntland. There have been reported defections and arrests, of both local Somalis and foreign fighters, by al-Shebab's Amniyat network in southern Somalia,[67] and rising concern that ISIS could team up with other militants in Somalia.[68] In 2016, a rival faction of al-Shebab led by Abdulqader Mu'min pledged allegiance to ISIS. In an apparent attempt to eliminate that faction, al-Shebab launched a failed amphibious incursion into Puntland on March 13, 2016, resulting in more than 300 members killed in clashes with Puntland and Galmudug Interim Administration forces.[69] At present, it is still an open question whether al-Shebab will attempt to strengthen ties with ISIS.

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[67] Anzalone, "The Resilience of Al-Shabaab."

[68] Adam Schreck, "Senior Emirati official warns of possibility of Islamic State and al-Shabab collaboration," *Associated Press*. Oct. 29, 2014, 2014, accessed February 10, 2017, http://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles /2014/10/29/uae-official-warns-of-potential-for-is-shabab-link.

[69] UN Security Council, *Report of the Monitoring Group on Somalia and Eritrea pursuant to Security Council resolution 2244 (2015): Somalia.*

Security Vulnerabilities in Somalia

The independent assessment involved gaining a depth of understanding around the security environment in which each affiliate or associate operated. We conducted the environmental analysis on the assumption that the success of an Al-Qaeda affiliate or associate is based not solely on resources, funding and leadership structure, but also on a permissive environment with security vulnerabilities. For al-Shebab, we concluded that there were six relevant security vulnerabilities in Somalia.

Table 1 below summarizes the vulnerabilities in Somalia, where al-Shebab operates. These vulnerabilities include internal conflict, a history of violent jihadism, partial/collapse of the government, government illegitimacy, demographic instabilities and security sector ineffectiveness.

Table 1.   Security vulnerabilities in Somalia

Vulnerability	Details
Internal conflict	• Somalia is in the midst of a civil war and has been embroiled in conflict since the late 1980s. • Contemporary conflict can be traced to the resistance movements to the Siad Barre regime. After the regime was deposed, multiple actors, including armed factions and clans, competed for power. • United Nations missions (UNOSOM I, UNITAF, UNOSOM II) operated in the country from 1992-1995, largely in a humanitarian capacity, but left before the resolution of the conflict. • By the early 2000s, there were multiple entities competing for power, including the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC), and the Transitional National Government (TNG), established in 2000, later known as the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), established in 2004. • From 2004-2006 al-Shebab was a militia associated with the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC). The UIC dates from the late 1990s, but grew in importance in the early 2000s as other forms of governance failed to take root in Somalia. The UIC was ideologically distinct from the clans and warlords, and was seen as an alternative source of leadership to the warlords. • In 2006, Ethiopia invaded and the UIC collapsed, leading to the rise of extreme splinter groups including al-Shebab, which continue to fight the Somali government and AMISOM forces. • While some areas of Somalia are somewhat stable, including large swathes of the semi-autonomous north, the south continues to see active fighting.
History of Violent Jihadism	• There is a long history of violent jihad in East Africa, including the area in and around Somalia. Sudan served as the base of Osama Bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders from 1991-1996, and was the site of several terrorist attacks, including the 2002 U.S. embassy bombing in Kenya. • In Somalia, al-Shebab's roots can be traced back to the 1980s and the activities of al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI), a Salafi organization that protested the secularist policies of long-time Somali dictator Siad Barre. AIAI had local goals as well as pan-Islamist objectives,[70] and it developed ties to Al-Qaeda in the 1990s.[71] AIAI's leadership included Aden Hashi Ayro, who would become al-Shebab's first leader.

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[70] Stig Jarle Hansen, *Al-Shabaab in Somalia: The History and Ideology of a Militant Islamist Group, 2005-2012*, (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

	• The formation of al-Shebab was aided by what remained of Al-Qaeda in East Africa.
Partial/Collapse of Government	• The Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) was established in 2012, assuming power from the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The government struggles to project power across much of the Somalia's southern territory, and President Mohamed Abdullahi "Farmajo" Mohamed could face a crisis of legitimacy if it does not demonstrate progress against al-Shebab[72] and the impending famine.[73]
	• There is a history of government collapse in Somalia. Somalia gained independence from the British and Italians in 1960. In 1969, a coup led by Mohamed Said Barre ousted Somalia's elected government.[74] Civil war in the 1980s led to the collapse of the government in 1991.[75] Years of relative lawlessness followed where varied groups, including clans, international peacekeepers and violent extremist organizations (VEOs), vied for control.[76] In May 1991, northern clans declared an independent Republic of Somaliland. Both Somaliland and

[71] United Nations, "SECURITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE PURSUANT TO RESOLUTIONS 1267 (1999) 1989 (2011) AND 2253 (2015) CONCERNING ISIL (DA'ESH) AL-QAIDA AND ASSOCIATED INDIVIDUALS GROUPS UNDERTAKINGS AND ENTITIES," United Nations Security Council Subsidiary Organs, accessed February 9, 2017, https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1267/aq_sanctions_list/summaries/entity/al-itihaad-al-islamiya/aiai.

[72] Safia Farole, "Somalia's new president now faces 3 big challenges," *The Washington Post*, 3/7/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/03/07/somalias-new-president-spent-time-in-buffalo-and-now-faces-these-3-challenges/?utm_term=.411872a10341.

[73] Jeffrey Gettleman, "Drought and War Heighten Threat of Not Just 1 Famine, but 4," *The New York Times,* 3/27/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/27/world/africa/famine-somalia-nigeria-south-sudan-yemen-water.html?mcubz=2&_r=0.

[74] The Central Intelligence Agency, "Africa: Somalia," The World Factbook, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html.

[75] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations With Somalia," U.S. Bilateral Relations Fact Sheets, 4/12/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2863.htm.

[76] The United Institute of Peace, "The Current Situation in Somalia: A USIP Fact Sheet," 1/30/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/01/current-situation-somalia.

	neighboring Puntland are self-governing, mainly autonomous and largely more stable than southern Somalia.[77] In 2012, the FGS was elected through limited, indirect elections. In February 2017, the FGS held a national election, its first since the 2012 transition. [78]
Government Illegitimacy	• The new government, though democratically elected, is nascent and untested. It faces enormous social, economic, political and security hurdles to ensure its lasting legitimacy. • Historically, clans, warlords and VEOs have gained power and influence during periods where the central government was either absent or lacking in legitimacy.
Demographic Instabilities	• Somalia scores low on most humanitarian development indicators, including governance, internal conflict, economic decline and poverty. Somalia has a high fertility rate despite famine and civil war, and as a result, more than 60% of the population in younger than 25.[79] • Somalia's large youth population lacks educational and employment opportunities and has one of the highest youth unemployment rates. • Millions of Somalis are either refugees or IDPs.[80] • There is a drought and impending famine in Somalia,[81] which will contribute to the demographic and humanitarian crisis. Al-Shebab prevents aid workers from reaching some of the most heavily impacted areas.
Security Sector Ineffectiveness	• The Somali government has been unable to retake or control all of its territory from al-Shebab, warlords and powerful clans, and relies on the aid of allies and partners to ensure its national security.

[77] The Central Intelligence Agency, "Africa: Somalia," The World Factbook, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html.

[78] U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Relations With Somalia," U.S. Bilateral Relations Fact Sheets, 4/12/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2863.htm.

[79] The Central Intelligence Agency, "Africa: Somalia," The World Factbook, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/so.html.

[80] The Central Intelligence Agency, "Africa: Somalia," The World Factbook.

[81] David McKenzie and Brent Swails, "Somalia: 'People are dying of hunger...there's no water'," CNN, 3/8/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/07/africa/somalia-famine-united-nations/.

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U.S. Approach to Countering al-Shebab

Before the official formation of al-Shebab, the U.S. military had a large presence in Somalia from 1992-1995. During this time the U.S. and other international forces operated under the auspices of the UN as part of the United Nations Operations in Somalia I (UNOSOM I), United Task Force (UNITAF), and United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II), largely in a humanitarian and stabilization capacity.[82] On October 3, 1993, eighteen U.S. soldiers were killed during an operation to seize high ranking officials from Mohamed Farah Aideed's clan when two Black Hawk helicopters were shot down. This event led President Clinton to set a deadline for the withdrawal of U.S. forced from Somalia in 1994.[83] In the late 1990s, Somalia again became a focus of U.S. counterterrorism operations after the 1998 bombings of U.S. embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salam, Tanzania, as terrorists thought to have operated out of Somalia.[84] Interest in Somalia subsequently declined until the rise of al-Shebab and its affiliation with Al-Qaeda in the mid-2000s.

U.S. government approaches

Table 2 below summarizes the approaches the U.S. has taken to counter al-Shebab after its reengagement in the Somalia in the 2000s.

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[82] Seth G. Jones, Andrew M. Liepman, and Nathan Chandler, *Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab*, Rand Corporation, 2016, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1539.html.

[83] Seth G. Jones, Andrew M. Liepman, and Nathan Chandler, *Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign Against Al Shabaab*, Rand Corporation.

[84] Paul D. Williams, "A Navy SEAL was killed in Somalia. Here's what you need to know about U.S. operations there.," *The Washington Post*, 5/8/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/08/a-navy-seal-was-killed-in-somalia-heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-u-s-operations-there/?utm_term=.6553e74328e6.

Table 2.   U.S. approaches to al-Shebab

U.S. Approach	Details
Unilateral Direct Action	• The U.S. military has undertaken several unilateral direct actions in Somalia under its counterterrorism mission. These have included: • Direct support to the Somali army mission targeting al-Shebab cells. • Offensive air strikes, including both manned strikes[85] and unmanned drone strikes. [86] • Varied on-the-ground missions carried out by special operators (both acknowledged and unacknowledged). • Targeting and killing top al-Shabaab leadership, including Ahmed Abdi Godane, [87]Abdi Nur Mahdi and Adan Garar .[88] • Targeting and killing rank-and-file al-Shebab militants in training camps. [89]

[85] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shebab's Strength, Not Weakness," *Foreign Policy*, 3/9/2016, accessed 6/5/2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-Shebabs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/.

[86] Conor Gaffey, "U.S. Troops 'Not on the Frontline' Against Al-Shabab in Somalia: Official," *Newsweek*, 5/11/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.newsweek.com/us-troops-frontline-against-al-Shabab-somalia-official-607715.; and Abdi Guled, "First U.S. military member killed in Somalia since 1993," Chicago Tribune, 5/5/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-us-military-somalia-al-shabab-20170505-story.html.; and, Dan Lamothe, "Trump signs off on the Pentagon carrying out offensive strikes in Somalia," *The Washington Post*, 3/30/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/checkpoint /wp/2017/03/30/trump-signs-off-on-the-pentagon-carrying-out-offensive-strikes-in-somalia/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.ef1eee87f781.

[87] David Francis, "How the United States is Trying to stop al-Shebab," *Foreign Policy*, 4/2/2015, accessed 6/5/2017, http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/02/how-the-united-states-is-trying-to-stop-al-Shebab/.

[88] Office of the Press Secretary, "Statement by the Press Secretary on the Death of Ahmed Godane," The White House: President Barack Obama, 9/5/2014, accessed 6/5/2017, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/05/statement-press-secretary-death-ahmed-godane.

[89] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shebab's Strength, Not Weakness." *Foreign Policy*, March 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/

	• Offensive raids to surgically target senior members al-Shebab[90]
	• Designation of southern Somalia as an area of active hostilities. This allows ground forces the ability to call in airstrikes without higher-level approval.[91]
	• Regional forward basing of U.S. forces[92]
Advise, Assist, and Accompany	• The U.S has been involved in an advise, assist, and accompany mission. This has included: ○ Deployment of U.S. military advisers in Somalia since at least late 2013.[93] U.S. forces deployed alongside Somali troops.[94] ○ Provide assistance to regional counterterrorism forces, including the Somali National Army and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) forces.[95] ○ Serving a coordination role between Somali security forces and AMISOM[96] ○ Establishment of authorities focused on partnered operations with Somali and African Union troops.

[90] "The Latest: Official: Senior Al-Shabab Members Were Target," *Associated Press,* May 5, 2017, accessed June 5, 2017, https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2017-05-05/the-latest-us-military-death-in-somalia-is-1st-since-1993.

[91] Tom O'Connor, "Trump Expands U.S. Military Campaign in Africa with Somalia Offensive ", *Newsweek,* 3/31/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.newsweek.com/trump-expand-military-campaign-africa-somalia-offensive-577347.

[92] The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, "Somalia: Reported US Cover Actions 2001-2016," 2/22/2012, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/drone-war/data/somalia-reported-us-covert-actions-2001-2017.

[93] Paul D. Williams, "A Navy SEAL was killed in Somalia. Here's what you need to know about U.S. operations there." *The Washington Post,* May 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/08/a-navy-seal-was-killed-in-somalia-heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-u-s-operations-there/?utm_term=.a097003d067c

[94] Conor Gaffey, "U.S. Troops 'Not on the Frontline' Against Al-Shabab in Somalia: Official." *Newsweek,* May 2017, http://www.newsweek.com/us-troops-frontline-against-al-shabab-somalia-official-607715

[95] Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, and Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War," The New York Times, 8/16/2016, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html.

[96] Carla E. Humud, *Al-Qaeda and U.S. Policy: Middle East and Africa,* Congressional Research Service, accessed 6/5/2017, https://fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R43756.pdf.

	▪ Example: On March 30, 2017, the Pentagon announced President Trump approved a Department of Defense proposal to provide additional precision fires in support of African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and Somali security forces operations.[97] ○ Working with other regional and European partners in Somalia.
Train & Equip Partner for CT	• The U.S. has trained and equipped Somali forces and AMISOM. • In April 2017 the U.S. military announced a deployment of U.S. forces for logistics training of Somalia's army.[98] • Training and equipping AMISOM forces Includes financial and material assistance.[99]
"Third Party" Partners (AMISOM, Ethiopia)	• Support to AMISOM and regional partners Ethiopia and Kenya. [100]
Security Sector Reform	• U.S. provides funds for SSR to the Somali military.[101]
Civilian Military Operations	• The U.S. participates in civil-military operations (CMO) indirectly by supporting AMISOM, which has stated that CMO is an important force enabler and a means to assist the FGS in stabilizing the country.[102]

[97] Bill Roggio, "US soldier killed battling Al-Qaeda's branch in Somalia," FDD's Long War Jounal, 5/9/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/05/us-soldier-killed-battling-Al-Qaedas-branch-in-somalia.php.

[98] Abdi Guled, "First U.S. military member killed in Somalia since 1993." Chicago Tribune, May 2017, http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/ct-us-military-somalia-al-shabab-20170505-story.html

[99] Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shebab's Strength, Not Weakness." *Foreign Policy*, March 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/

[100] Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War." New York Times, October 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html

[101] Nancy Muigei, *Security Sector Reform/Development in Somalia*, The International Peace Support Training Centre Nairobi, Kenya, 2013, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.ipstc.org/media/documents/occasional_paper_4-7.pdf.

[102] African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), "AMISOM engages partners on Civil-Military operations," 5/14/2015, accessed 6/5/2017, http://amisom-au.org/2015/05/amisom-engages-partners-on-civil-military-operations/.

	• This is not a focus of U.S. DoD.
Messaging/counter-messaging	• We were unable to identify examples of this approach in the open literature.
Intelligence and Information Sharing	• U.S. forces are involved in surveillance and reconnaissance, in addition to assault and capture operations. [103]
Established US posture in theater to support persistent CT operations	• The U.S has established a military presence in theater, including a base in Djibouti to coordinate its operations in East Africa.[104] • The United States also maintains drone intelligence surveillance of Somalia from installations in Ethiopia, Djibouti, and the Seychelles.[105]
Support Host Nation Ability to Own the Battlespace	• A key goal of U.S. involvement in Somalia has been training Somali forces to control their own battlespace. This has been met with mixed results.

[103] Bureau of Investigative Journalism, "Somalia: Reported US Cover Actions 2001-2016." February 2012, https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/drone-war/data/somalia-reported-us-covert-actions-2001-2017

[104] Paul D. Williams, "A Navy SEAL was killed in Somalia. Here's what you need to know about U.S. operations there." *The Washington Post*, May 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/05/08/a-navy-seal-was-killed-in-somalia-heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-u-s-operations-there/?utm_term=.a097003d067c

[105] David H. Shinn, "International Efforts to Counter Al-Shabaab," E-International Relations, 2/20/2012, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.e-ir.info/2012/02/20/international-efforts-to-counter-al-shabaab/.

Discussion

At any time did the U.S. effectively defeat, dismantle, or disrupt al-Shebab?

The U.S. has played a role in **partially disrupting** al-Shebab. The U.S. has **not dismantled or defeated** al-Shebab.

The U.S. has helped to reduce al-Shebab's ability to hold territory by advising, assisting, training, and equipping AMISOM and Somali forces. These forces have successfully ousted al-Shebab from the major strongholds it held in 2010-2011. Al-Shebab still controls rural territory, however, and uses its position to carry out attacks on AMISOM and Somali forces. A reduction in al-Shebab's ability to hold territory is only partially the result of AMISOM and Somali operations, which have on the whole had mixed results. Al-Shebab's ability to hold territory was also diminished by poor strategic and military planning within al-Shebab, including the failed Ramadan Offensive which left al-Shebab weakened and susceptible to AMISOM counter-attacks.

Despite a loss of territory, al-Shebab maintains the ability to carry out coordinated attacks. Al-Shebab has also continued to develop new and more sophisticated attacks. These attacks have included the September 2013 Westgate shopping mall attack, the April 2015 Garissa University College attack, and the February 2016 attack on a commercial airliner, which used a bomb hidden in a laptop computer.[106] There are also numerous small-scale yet effective attacks on AMISOM and Somali forces.

It is probable that al-Shebab is in communication with other AQ affiliates, including AQIM and AQAP. There is speculation that the airplane bomb used by al-Shebab in 2016 was either provided by or aided by expertise from AQAP. It is unclear yet unlikely that DoD actions have reduced al-Shebab's ability to acquire weapons and materials given the multitude of large and small scale weaponry available in Somalia after decades of civil war. There is likely a transfer of technology and tactics between al-Shebab and other AQ affiliates, specifically AQAP.

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[106] Robyn Kriel and Susanna Capelouto, "Al-Shabaab claims responsibility for Somalia in-flight jet blast," CNN, 2/13/2016, accessed 6/5/2017, http://www.cnn.com/2016/02/13/africa/somalia-plane-bomb-al-shabaab/.

DoD has reduced al-Shebab's ability to train its fighters by effectively targeting training camps. It is unclear as to whether DoD has impacted al-Shebab's ability to recruit as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) has not been a focus of DoD activity. The U.S. has not effectively disrupted al-Shebab's ability to conduct propaganda activities.

By far the most effective CT tool employed by U.S. DoD has been unilateral direct action though manned and unmanned strikes, as well on the ground surgical strike operations. These operations have been used to killed and capture al-Shebab leaders. It is unclear, however, what lasting role this has played on physically weakening the network, as leaders are quickly replaced. *Al-Shebab has survived the successful targeting of some of its most instrumental and influential leaders.*

The al-Shebab network has repeatedly splintered into factions, but this is largely due to internal dynamics and differences over ideology, leadership styles and visions for the future. External pressure from the U.S., AMISOM and Somali contributed to but did not cause these splinters. It is unlikely that al-Shebab is fully isolated from other affiliates given an apparent transfer of fighters, funds, tactics, and materials from AQAP and AQIM.

Regionally and locally, the DoD has not focused its resources on large-scale CMO and SSR, which would help in marginalizing al-Shebab from locals. The U.S. may have had secondary impact on marginalizing al-Shebab locally/regionally by supporting AMISOM's CMO activities. However, AMISOM is similarly focused largely on kinetic activities and has deprioritized CMO.

Recent attacks indicate that al-Shebab retains the ability to carry out large-scale and complex attacks, in addition to small-scale attacks on AMISOM and Somali forces, and the FGS. Since its territorial loss in 2012, Al-Shebab has avoided overstretching by diminishing its role in local governance, avoiding direct confrontation with AMISOM forces, and focusing on terrorist tactics in Somalia and surrounding countries.

U.S. actions have not led to the defeat of al-Shebab. AMISOM and Somali forces have prevented the spread to al-Shebab into areas they once controlled in southern Somalia, but AMISOM is overstretched and the Somali army remains largely undertrained and poorly equipped for the goal of fully defeating al-Shebab.[107] Al-

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[107] Mark Mazzetti, Jeffrey Gettleman, Eric Schmitt, "In Somalia, U.S. Escalates a Shadow War." New York Times, October 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/16/world/africa/obama-somalia-secret-war.html

Shebab still de-facto controls large parts of the country even though they have not officially established governance. [108]

Did any security vulnerabilities emerge since the start of al-Shebab?

Al-Shebab's ability to control territory, project power and recruit in Somalia is directly aided by underlying vulnerabilities in Somalia that continue to persist, including a nascent and untested central government, an ongoing humanitarian crisis, limited advancement opportunities for Somalia's large youth population and an unstable security environment.

The U.S. DoD has supported actions that have contributed to increased vulnerabilities in Somalia. For instance, the U.S. support of the 2006 Ethiopian invasion led to the collapse of the relatively moderate UIC, contributing to the rise of extremist groups, including al-Shebab.

Somalia has continued to struggle with internal conflict. Though Somalia now has a democratically elected central government, it has yet to prove is legitimacy and ability to govern. A key factor will be how successfully the government can respond to and contain the current drought and impending famine. Al-Shebab has historically taken advantage of crises in Somalia, including droughts and famines, in order to gain territory and undermine the government.

Demographic issues continue to drive recruitment to al-Shebab.

Overall, the vulnerabilities in Somalia have been used and exacerbated by al-Shebab, but not created by al-Shebab.

What were the major shifts or changes in the U.S. approach?

Though the U.S. has been involved in Somalia since the 1990s (pre-al-Shebab), its engagement has been uneven and discontinuous in accordance with shifting national security and humanitarian interests over the course of five administrations. The U.S. largely disengaged from Somalia after the 1993 Black Hawk Down incident,

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[108] Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Why are efforts to counter al-Shabab falling so flat?," Brookings, 4/5/2016, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2016/04/05/why-are-efforts-to-counter-al-Shabab-falling-so-flat/.

supporting AMISOM forces indirectly through material and financial support.[109] Over time, the perceived growing threat from terrorism, the rise of Al-Qaeda and its affiliates, and the introduction of the Global War on Terror (GWOT) propelled Somalia back into the realm on U.S. strategic security interests. This was demonstrated by increased drone strikes, and later, in-theater operations by U.S. special forces.[110] Currently, U.S. forces act both independently and in concert with AMISOM, Somali, Ethiopian and other forces on the ground.

During the Obama Administration there was a large increase in the use of drone strikes to target high value targets (HVT) as well as rank-and-file al-Shebab fighters.[111] There were also unacknowledged on the ground operations.

The Trump Administration has expanded the DoD's resources (including sanctioning precision strikes to support AMISOM and Somali forces) and has relaxed the permissions required for direct action. There are also acknowledged on the ground operations.[112] These increased resources may be useful as a short term force multiplier, but do not address the underlying vulnerabilities. Addressing underlying conditions is largely outside the remit of DoD. DoD operations must ensure they are not, however, exacerbating underlying conditions.

The U.S. DoD has used a similar toolkit throughout its re-engagement in Somalia from 2003 onwards including varied levels of (primarily) (1) HVT and other direct strikes (2) advising, assisting AMISOM/Somali forces (3) training and equipping AMISOM/Somali forces.

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[109] Peter Dörrie, "23 Years After 'Black Hawk Down,' America Is Back at War in Somalia," The National Interest, 8/4/2016, accessed 6/5/2017, http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/23-years-after-%E2%80%98black-hawk-down%E2%80%99-america-back-war-somalia-17930.

[110] Peter Dörrie, "23 Years After 'Black Hawk Down,' America Is Back at War in Somalia."

[111]Ty McCormick, "U.S. Attacks Reveal Al-Shebab's Strength, Not Weakness." *Foreign Policy*, March 2016, http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/u-s-attacks-reveal-al-shababs-strength-not-weakness-somalia/

[112] U.S. Department of Defense, "Statement by Pentagon Spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis on U.S. Counterterrorism Operations in Somalia," 3/30/2017, accessed 6/5/2017, https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Releases/News-Release-View/Article/1135338/.

Conclusion

In this case study, we examined al-Shebab's leadership structure, its relationship with Al-Qaeda core, its ideology and goals, and its funding. We also examined how the group has evolved over time. We outlined the vulnerabilities in Somalia's security environment that al-Shebab has exploited, and the relative effectiveness of the U.S. government's approaches to counter al-Shebab over time. For the full context in which this case study was used, see the *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda*.[113]

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[113] McQuaid, et. al., *Independent Assessment of U.S. Government Efforts against Al-Qaeda*, CNA DRM-2017-U-015710-Final, August 2017.

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